THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (d) The estimated value of net oil imports during April-September 2003 was Rs. 34,663 crore. The estimated value of net oil imports in the coming years would *inter alia* depend upon the quantity of net imports, international prices of crude oil and petroleum products and exchange rate.

The country's oil import dependence is on account of the difference between the requirement of crude oil to meet the domestic demand of petroleum products and the indigenous production of crude oil. Steps taken by the Government to reduce the oil import dependence include the following:

(1) Efforts made to increase the production of-crude oil and gas by:

(i) Increasing the exploration efforts through the New Exploration Licensing Policy.

(ii) Improving the recovery factor from the existing major fields by implementing Enhance Oil Recovery (EOR)/Improved Oil Recovery (IOR) schemes.

(iii) Exploring new areas, especially in deep water and difficult frontier areas, as also exploring in the deeper layers of the producing fields.

(iv) Faster development of newly discovered fields and increased use of new technologies for seismic surveys, work over, simulation operations, drilling of wells etc. in producing areas.

(v) Acquiring acreages abroad.

(2) Mandating ethanol blending of petrol in certain States and Union Territories.

(3) Increasing awareness of the oil conservation measures.

Violation of sale agreement by ESSAR

739. SHRI LAJPAT RAI:

SHRI RAJIV RANJAN SINGH 'LALAN':

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(a) whether it is a fact that Essar Oil Company is selling diesel at cheaper rates than the public sector oil companies in the country in violation of the earlier stipulated agreement;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that while authorizing Essar Oil Company to sell petroleum products, the company had been made to sign an agreement; and

(c) if so, the details of the terms and conditions, compliance of which was compulsory by the company in order to get the rights of selling petroleum products?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) With the dismantling of Administered Pricing Mechanism (APM) in the petroleum sector effective from 1.4.02, the pricing of diesel has been decontrolled.

M/s Essar Oil Limited (EOL) was granted authorization for marketing transportation fuels including diesel in terms of the guidelines stipulated in the resolution dated 8th March 2002 of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. Under these guidelines, a new entrant is required to meet the investment criteria of Rs. 2000 crores and to fulfill the Retail Service/Market Service obligations. EOL has submitted a plan to the Government while seeking the authorization for marketing rights, to set up retail outlets as per the guidelines of the Government in various parts of the country to market the transportation fuel. While, the Government have not signed any separate agreement with the EOL, stipulating any specific condition, the company is bound by the conditions mentioned in the aforesaid resolution of 8th March 2002.

VRS in IOC and ONGC

740. SHRI AMAR SINGH:

SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of employees of Indian Oil Corporation and Oil and

• Natural Gas Corporation who have opted Voluntary Retirement Scheme during the last two years;

(b) whether Government are aware that a large number of. retirees especially from ONGC are joining private oil companies as experts and sharing their know-how with them; and